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SUBJECT: EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN COUNTER-TERRORISM
DISCUSSIONS IN ISTANBUL

REF: A. STATE 90114 B. ANKARA 3327

Classified By: AMB. ROSS WILSON FOR REASONS 1.4 B, D

11. (S/NF) Summary: U.S. Chiefs of Mission and others from posts in Amman, Ankara, Athens, Beirut, Cairo, Istanbul, Jerusalem, Nicosia and Tel Aviv joined representatives from S/CT, EUR, NEA, the National Counterterrorism Center, EUCOM, SOCOM, Justice and other agencies at ConGenIstanbul June 16-17, 2006, for an Eastern Mediterranean Regional Security Initiative meeting. Participants discussed national, regional and global terrorism threats in their countries, as well as the interconnections among them where they exist. They identified five potential areas for which regional approaches could be feasible and appropriate:

- establishing a regional law enforcement center with a CT component;
- improving border security, to include container security initiatives;
- working more effectively to counter PKK terrorist activities;
- countering extremist ideologies; and
- strengthening Lebanon.

COMs agreed to meet again in October either in Washington or Athens. End summary.

A Regional Nexus

12. (S/NF) A crossroads of civilization since antiquity, the Eastern Mediterranean remains a critical transit point for flows of people, goods and money between the Middle East, Central Asia, and Europe. Opening remarks highlighted the unique nature of this conference in bringing together people from different regional bureaus and military theaters who don't normally engage with one another. COMs and Washington participants reviewed key issues country-by-country and terror group-by-group. All countries deal in varying degrees with al-Qaida and other global terrorist threats. Several have regional terrorism problems (PKK, Palestinian groups that affect Israel and the West Bank/Gaza). A number also face more or less national/local terrorist challenges

(November 17 and its successors in Greece, Hizballah in Lebanon, etc.), some of which -- like Hizballah -- also have international reach. NCTC briefed on the counterterrorism National Implementation Plan (NIP) and actions flowing from it.

¶3. (S/NF) Discussion focused on identifying linkages and potential areas of cooperation among posts and among the involved countries on several levels - including security, political and public diplomacy/public attitudes. Noting that local and regional aspects of our counter-terrorism efforts historically have been the least adequately addressed, COMs discussed how best to use available diplomatic, political and military tools, as well as public diplomacy, economic power and support for enhanced rule of law in the region to address this challenge. In this context, participants identified five areas for further work as part of a broader Eastern Mediterranean CT effort.

Specific Proposals

¶4. (S/NF) Support for Regional Law Enforcement Training: Conference participants unanimously agreed on the utility of developing law enforcement (including CT-specific) capabilities throughout the region. They believed that it is time to consider establishing for the Eastern Med countries something like the International Law Enforcement Academy in Budapest, noting that this would also help to foster and enhance personal contacts and cooperation among their countries that is now lacking. One suggestion was to make use of the facilities of the Jordan International Police Training Center (JIPTC) as Iraqi security forces training there diminishes. NATO's Center of Excellence - Defense Against Terrorism (COE-DAT) Center based in Turkey could be another useful forum. This training could also extend to promoting regional cooperation between Ministries of Justice and Public Prosecutors.

¶5. (S/NF) Improve Border Security: Participants agreed that border security has obvious regional implications and that cooperation among their countries is lacking in this area, too. They agreed on the importance of expanding the reach of border technology programs, such as technologies to prevent clandestine crossings as well as fingerprint data sharing and other biometric initiatives. The biometrics project developed coming out of the Iraq Neighbors S/CT COM regional meeting, might be a template. Port security, in particular, was seen as a potential area for leveraging self-interested support and possible financial assistance from the United Arab Emirates, which has implemented a successful Container Security Initiative in Dubai and which has ties to most if not all of the Eastern Med countries represented.

¶6. (S/NF) Countering the PKK: Though the region is host to a number of terrorist organizations, many of which cooperate with one another, few were seen as operating on a large scale beyond Iraq, the Palestinian territories or their own domestic borders. Conference participants agreed however, that making progress against the PKK was important for encouraging enhanced Turkish cooperation in regional CT initiatives. There was also some discussion of trying to develop better Turkish-Greek cooperation/collaboration on the PKK. Participants also discussed reinvigorating the existing tripartite US-Iraq-Turkey initiative on the PKK, the need to raise the PKK from Tier-3 to Tier-2 status as a target for USG efforts, strengthening US efforts against the PKK in Europe, and implementing other actions agreed interagency in 2004-05 to counter the PKK threat more effectively.

¶7. (S/NF) Countering Extremism: Participants recognized the need for strategies that address underlying issues, including especially to counter extremism in the region. They considered how best to contend with the extremist ideologies that fuel terrorist operations, e.g., through support for initiatives such as King Abdullah's "Amman message" on Islam as a religion of moderation. Promoting such visions with the Jordanians, through Turkey's leadership role in the BMENA

Democracy Assistance Dialogue, and through NATO,s COE-DAT could help reduce extremism. Participants cited the value of nurturing scholars, and people-to-people contacts. One suggestion that may be helpful in many countries was to develop a long-term and large-scale program to bring imams to the US for education in US theological faculties, which might help moderate tendencies to relate to the US and the West through extremist eyes. EUCOM,s representative described the success (5 million hits per month) of a website developed by DOD in conjunction with country teams at our Balkan embassies aimed at winning the hearts and minds of youth in that region.

¶18. (S/NF) Strengthening Lebanon: Participants acknowledged that Lebanon represented a particularly critical case where politics and terrorists mix, and where the latter exploit longstanding confessional power sharing arrangements to undermine the state further. COMs discussed the need to strengthen Lebanon,s state institutions and marginalize Hizballah. One thought was to encourage regional governments and organizations to promote non-Hizballah Shia leaders by including them in conferences as legitimate representatives of Lebanon and/or its Shia community. While a Lebanon strategy was beyond the obvious purview of this conference, there was recognition of the need for a more comprehensive approach with key regional governments toward supporting and further developing effective governance in Lebanon. It was noted that Turkey, following a successful visit by PM Sinoria, might be able to play a more helpful role.

¶19. (S/NF) Finally, COMs raised concerns and sought clarification from Washington concerning the impact of the NIP,s ambitious and multiple taskings on existing operations and budgets, and requested assistance in obtaining and obligating significant additional funding to undertake this regional CT strategy. To focus efforts and support budget requests, COMs suggested that NEA and EUR consider including in the CT portion of their BPPs a specific strategy to defeat terrorism in the Eastern Mediterranean, together with a coordinated legislative outreach.

Maintaining Momentum

¶10. (S/NF) COMs agreed to maintain regular contact and to meet again in the fall to further refine elements of a regional strategy. Embassy Athens offered to host the next meeting in October 2006. As an alternative, there was some discussion of separate meetings in the fall that might bring the NEA ambassadors to Washington, to which Ankara, Athens and Nicosia could be added for a sidebar discussion. Plans are also in the works to establish in Turkey a position dedicated to supporting regional CT work and strategy development, and the Ankara COM undertook to consult with other participants at the Istanbul meeting as this slot gets stood up.

¶11. (U) Participating COMs have cleared this cable.
JONES